

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 EB-11 COME-00 TRSE-00

FEA-02 INT-08 SCI-06 IO-14 SAJ-01 OMB-01 DRC-01 /142 W

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O R 191333Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9651

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 0340

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ENGR, IR, BE

SUBJECT: LEBURTON GOVERNMENT FALLS

REF: BRUSSELS 319

1. PRIME MINISTER EDMOND LEBURTON SUBMITTED THE RE-SIGNATIONS OF HIS COALITION CABINET TO KING BAUDOUIN JANUARY 19. THE FALL OF THE SOCIALIST-LED GOVERNMENT AFTER ONE YEAR IN OFFICE WAS PRECIPITATED BY THE COLLAPSE OF THE JOINT BELGIAN IRANIAN "IBRAMCO" OIL REFINERY PROJECT FOR THE LIEGE AREA. THE PROJECT HAD BEEN SUPPORTED FERVENTLY BY THE BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB), AND WITH SOME WARMTH BY WALLONIAN LEADERS OF ALL THREE GOVERNING PARTIES. THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE BELGIAN POLITICAL SPECTRUM ON THE OTHER HAND, THE

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PROJECT AROUSED ONLY FLACCID AND CONDITIONAL SUPPORT DIFFICULT TO

DISTINGUISH FROM OPPOSITION, AS IN THE CASE OF THE POWERFUL FLEMISH SOCIAL-CHRISTIAN (CVP), OR OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION (E.G. FROM THE FLEMISH VOLKSUNIE).

2. THE OSTENSIBLE MOTIVATION FOR THE RESIGNATION WAS THE SOCIALIST PARTY DECISION THAT THE COLLAPSE OF ITS CHERISHED PROJECT WAS THE RESULT OF HOSTILE STALLING BY THE OTHER TWO GOVERNMENT PARTIES WHICH HAD LED TO THE UNWILLINGNESS OF THE IRANIAN PARTNER TO PROCEED. THE STALLING IS DEPICTED BY THE SOCIALISTS AS REFLECTING SO STRONG A HOSTILITY TO THE PRINCIPLE OF "INTRODUCING SOCIALISM" INTO THE OIL INDUSTRY THAT FURTHER INTERPARTY COLLABORATION IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT NEW ELECTIONS. (ACTUALLY, THE PSB ACTION IS MORE POLITICAL AND TACTICAL THAN THIS IDEOLOGICAL LINE IMPLIES.)

3. IN THE OTHER PARTIES, THE BELIEF IS STRONG THAT THE PSB REACTION REFLECTS CALCULATION THAT NEW ELECTIONS WOULD STRENGTHEN THE PSB HAND. WHETHER THIS CALCULATION IS CORRECT IS ANOTHER MATTER; THERE IS ALSO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT NONE OF THE THREE GOVERNING PARTIES HAS MUCH TO GAIN FROM NEW ELECTIONS.

4. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER TODAY'S MEETING WITH THE KING WILL LEAD TO EFFORTS TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT OR TO THE CALLING OF ELECTIONS. IT WAS ANNOUNCED JANUARY 19 THAT THE KING HAD ASKED LEBURTON AND HIS CABINET TO CONTINUE AS CARETAKERS.

5. EMBASSY IS INFORMED THAT THE BELGIAN AMBASSADOR IN IRAN HAS BEEN UNABLE TO REACH RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS IN TEHRAN TO PURSUE THE MATTER OF A BELGIAN DELEGATION PROCEEDING TO IRAN TO RENEW NEGOTIATIONS ON IBRAMCO. FACT THAT SHAH IS VACATIONING IN SWITZERLAND WILL MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT TO MAKE SUCH ARRANGEMENTS, IF INDEED THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT STILL INTENDS TO FOLLOW THIS TRACK.

6. THE EFFECTS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS ON US INTERESTS APPEAR

MINIMAL IN THE SHORT TERM, I.E. OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS. A BELGIAN DECISION ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT WAS NOT EXPECTED UNTIL APRIL IN ANY CASE. DELAY IS NOT LIKELY TO HURT US AND COULD EVEN BE HELPFUL, PARTICULARLY IF DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS SHOULD BE REPLACED IN A NEW GOVERNMENT. THE BELGIAN

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POSITION ON BURDEN-SHARING HAS BEEN AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO BE ONE REFLECTING THE GOOD WILL OF PROFESSIONALS LIKE DE STAERCKE AND DAVIGNON. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD VAN ELSLANDE WILL BE IN OFFICE IN CARETAKER STATUS TO ATTEND THE FEBRUARY 11 ENERGY ACTION CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON, AND THE BELGIAN ROLE

SHOULD NOT DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IF THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT FALLEN. STRAUZS-HUPE

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